

Ain't No Sunshine When She's Gone by **EvieSmallwood**

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Summary:

The boys have a memorial service for El in Mike's basement.

Ain't No Sunshine When She's Gone

It's been two weeks since she died. Two heavy-hearted weeks, during which he doesn't eat, he doesn't sleep, he doesn't even breathe (or at least, he doesn't remember breathing, anyway). He can't taste. His fingers are numb, he can't touch. His heart seems to have frozen in place and forgotten how to beat.

The basement, which he hasn't dared enter since the night she left, is dark. Nancy is by his side, attired in a lace black dress which reaches her knees. She places her hand on his shoulder. "Mike? Are you...?"

"No. Yeah. I'm good. Totally good."

She looks down at him with the same expression she's been bearing for a while. It's pity, mixed with some form of awe and admiration. "I'll be here," she whispers.

Mike nods. That's enough for him just then. Her solidarity brings him some form of courage. So he takes a deep breath and begins his descent of the stairwell to the basement, his sister lingering a few steps behind. The light is on down below, and he can hear his friends muttering among themselves.

It doesn't take much for his heart to break these days. Seeing them, though — that does it.

They're dressed in suits — Dustin and Lucas wearing the same ones they used at Will's funeral, with the previously absentee boy drowning in a hand-me-down of Jonathan's.

"So," says Dustin, shifting awkwardly. "Uh, we thought we'd do this for you, to remember El—"

"Because no one is gonna throw her a real funeral," Lucas throws in.

Will smiles tightly. "This... is kind of the best we could do."

The table is laid out with El's favourite junk foods — at least, the ones they knew she liked. Eggos are stacked up in the centre, with red vines and for some reason authentic Nilla wafers off to the side.

Mike stares at it, and his friends, and feels his fists curl.

He nods. "Yeah," he says, tugging at the hem of his white dress shirt. "I... thanks."

His voice is weak. Dustin smiles, Lucas nods, and Will looks to the ground. Mike can't catch his breath. Light headed, suddenly overwhelmed with both appreciation for his friends and longing for El, he walks over to the couch and sits down heavily.

Dustin clears his throat. "We wrote speeches," he says, quietly. "Is that... okay?"

Mike takes a moment. Just a moment. He places his head in his hands and pushes away the thoughts of her, though he knows it'll be pointless in the end. The pain is too great and this will only intensify it. "Yeah," he croaks at last, looking up with blurry eyes.

Dustin nods shortly. He removes a crumpled piece of lined paper from his coat pocket and unfolds it. Then he clears his throat again, and speaks.

"Eleven, you were super awesome and super cool, and you had awesome powers, and you could do crazy shit with your mind—"

Lucas whaps him on the chest, and they have a staring match. Mike fixes his gaze at the wall opposite him, trying to ignore Nancy and Will's looming, awkward figures. Dustin eventually continues. "The point is, your powers weren't the thing that made you so great. It was your kindness, and your loyalty, and your bravery that saved us. It was super nice of you to sacrifice yourself. I'm sorry we couldn't have known you for..." he hesitates, squinting at the smudged ink on the page. "For longer."

"Okay, my turn," says Lucas, glancing anxiously at Mike. He retrieves a notebook from the table and flips through it, finding his page. "El... I wanted to say that I'm sorry. I was stupid to think you were lying, and I was stupid to push you away—" his voice catches, "it just means I got less time with you in the end. I was a total jerk and I know that now. You were... you were a really great friend. We'll miss you."

The air grows solemn, and sickly so. Mike can't look at Lucas, who is crying silent tears. He can't look at any of them. So he stares at the carpet instead, eyes growing hot, chest tightening. He knows that Dustin is comforting Lucas, and that Will is saying *something* (whatever it is, the roaring in his ears provides a blockade through which only her voice could break). He runs his hands through his hair, clutching at the ends, wanting it all to stop.

"Are you okay, Mike?"

That's Nancy. He can just make her out. Mike's head snaps up. "I'm fine," he croaks out, though it's obvious he's not. "Just keep going, okay?"

There's only Will left, at least. Nancy nods, placing her arms behind her back and standing by the stairwell like a sentry guard.

"So... So I don't really know what to say. I wasn't sure exactly what to write, because I didn't know her—"

That's when Mike springs up (*he can't take it anymore, he just can't take it — his mind won't let him stay there in that stifling room another second*). Tears are flowing down his cheeks. The only option is to run to the bathroom, where he can be alone, where he can shatter in peace.

And so he goes, slamming the door behind him, locking it to. Mike leans over the sink, the cool countertop pressing into his belly. A sweat is breaking out on his brow. He pants, and then sobs, weakly ripping off his jacket because it's so damn *hot*. He's never been met with a warmer November night.

Tears fall into the basement below him. He thinks of the time they were both in here together, when she had leaned toward him and he'd done the same to her, and some sort of electricity had buzzed in the air between them.

Mike stares at his reflection in the mirror, imagining that the glass is broken. Imagining that she is standing next to him, reaching out a hand to his shoulder (*and for a split, terrifying second he sees it — the air becomes thick and filled with a foreign substance; the light goes out*

and everything is dark and cold and dank; the smell of decay is heavy and forthright; and there she is, dress in dirty tatters, cheeks sunken, nearly touching him, dear God, she could be, even—) but then he's pulled out of any such reverie when the brass doorknob rattles.

"Mike?!"

It's Nancy again. She's smacking her hand against the door, and urgently, too. He can hear the boys talking through the thin wood, and his heart sinks.

"Mike, please come out," his sister calls, sounding so far away there might as well be oceans between them.

All he can see is him, all he can think is that El isn't there.

Nancy slaps the door again. "You've been in there for ages! Jesus, Mike, *please!*"

Ages? Ages? It's been three minutes. At the most, four. But what if... what if...

"At least tell me you're okay?"

She was real, he decides. *She must have been. Real and ripped away and maybe dead because she needed me. Real, dead, but what's dead and what's real anymore? She's dead here but she isn't there, and she isn't here but she can't be there because she's dead.*

He reaches out with a pale hand and unlocks the door, still shaking, still crying. Nancy is, too. Mike falls into her arms, not caring about anyone else, not caring anymore because it's just so much easier not to.

"It's okay," she whispers, stroking his hair back. "It's okay. I know it hurts. I'm so, so sorry..."

She sobs, because they both lost. Mike holds her a little tighter, thinking of the day he didn't but should have. "Make it go away," he begs, not really sure what's coming out of his mouth. "Just make it go away..."

"Mike," Nancy draws back and looks at him steadfast in the eye. "Even if I could, I wouldn't. I wouldn't dare. At least you have this," she places her hand over his heart, knowing where the pain is, because hers is there too (*It must be genetics*, he thinks wildly). "That's better than nothing, isn't it?"

Is it?

"Mike," it's Will. "Mike, I gotta go. Jonathan's here—" Mike feels Nancy stiffen "—but I just wanted to say... she saved me. And she was... I know she was good. And good people deserved to be missed, don't you think?"

Suddenly everything is clear. "Yeah," Mike says, nodding. He wipes his eyes. "Yeah. You're right."

And then he's pulling his tiny best friend into a long overdue hug. "Goodnight, Will."

Will, looking a little befuddled, a little dazed, withdraws from Mike's arms. "Goodnight," he says, rushed. Then he's bolting up the stairs.

Mike feels Nancy wrap her arm around him. Dustin and Lucas both smile reassuringly, and he thinks just maybe he'll be okay.

"Let's go watch Star Wars, huh?"

There is no light in his trailer, aside from the tiny embers at the end of his cigarette. Hopper takes a deep drag, watching vague shadows dance across the wooden walls, and leans back on his couch.

He called Joyce earlier, about something the vodka prevents him from remembering. He happened to mention the boys, and she told him. Told him about their little gathering. A memorial service. Sort of.

It was enough to get him to hang up the phone and take that first drink, which dug up the guilt. From the guilt came the anger, which downed the bottle.

Six pills later and here he was, alone in his trailer, with nothing but

thoughts of self-hatred.

I killed another one, he thinks.

Two weeks later, he finds her alone in the woods. That's day one.

Author's Note:

Hey, dudes! This was written a while ago, but I've edited it so that it's still relevant. I still remember the conversation I had with a couple of friends that inspired this angst-filled fic. Ah, pre season 2. Those were the days.

Anyway, please leave feedback if you enjoyed!